

POUPART 100 POST

1895 ~ 1995

Centenary Issue
Summer 1995

WHAT WAS IT LIKE THEN?

IN 1895 when Poupart first began its traditions of service and innovation, what was the world like?

The reigning monarch was Queen Victoria. Gaslighting was commonplace and electric lightbulbs had only been around for 15 years. The Boer War had not yet begun. Postage cost a penny - an old penny! In America, the West was still wild, with Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid robbing trains. In the same year Groucho Marx was born.

In old Covent Garden, where John Poupart at the tender age of nineteen years took the bold step of setting himself up as a market agent, the market was already bulging at the seams. As well as the wide range of produce grown by local market gardening families, such as the Poupart's, many different fruits, some of them fairly exotic ones, had begun to be imported but the import business was just in its infancy, as was refrigeration. There was a great deal of competition but it



COVENT GARDEN AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS CENTURY

was nonetheless a good time for a young man with drive and integrity to start a business and we in today's company are proud to celebrate its continuing success 100 years on.

WHAT IS IT LIKE NOW?

POUPART has evolved and developed during its hundred year life. It has moved from a single proprietor business, growing and marketing its own produce, to a subsidiary of a major food group representing growers from the UK and around the world, supplying every type of client. Today the company and its subsidiaries operate from sixteen sites and it has an annual turnover in excess of £80 mln. Its future is clearly focused on wholesaling, both primary and distributive, importing and supplying supermarkets through

its joint venture companies.

Although these changes have been immense, the company has not lost sight of the fact that its personnel are the true strength and asset of its business. Throughout its life the company has benefited from the skill and dedication of those it has employed. This is as true today as in 1895. From this secure foundation the company's ambitions and future will always be assured.

JOHN POUPART, THE COMPANY'S FOUNDER

John Poupart's Ancestors

IT was a young man called **John Poupart** who at the age of 19 years, in May and June of 1895, took the steps which were to form the original Poupart company.

But to explain how that came about, we need to look much farther back - to the eighteenth century. A Frenchman, a Huguenot, named **Jean Poupart** arrived in England and though we have no documented evidence, we think he was a market gardener by trade. What is certain is that in 1776 his son **Jacques** was in the market garden business on a piece of land which, Chelsea supporters might like to know, is now part of Stamford Bridge, Chelsea Football Club's ground.

Jacques' son **Samuel** born in 1807, probably the great uncle of our founder, John Poupart, had a market garden at Battersea on Lord Spencer's estate. We think John's grandfather, **William**, was Samuel's younger brother. The family farmhouse which stood a mile or so north of today's Clapham Junction was demolished to build the railway lines and was commemorated till the 1960s by a signal box known

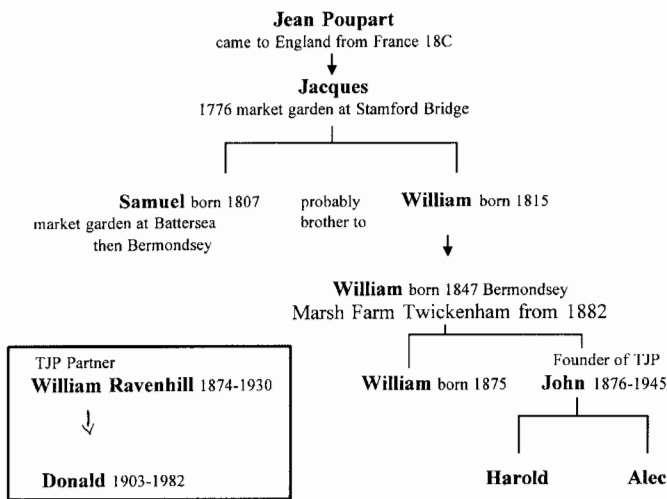
as Poupart Junction, not so far from New Covent Garden Market at Vauxhall, where one of the Poupart branches thrives to this day.

By the middle of the nineteenth century there were at least four Poupart's selling their produce in London's markets. Three are listed as members of the Market Gardeners, Nurserymen and Farmers Association between 1851 and 1860, which campaigned for a better deal for many of the market gardeners who had to sell their wares in the open in competition with the lucky few who had obtained sheltered shops in the new Charter Market. Samuel Poupart was one of the signatories of a petition for a new building.

The early market gardeners had produced and sold their own crops but as the London markets grew larger and holdings moved further out, it often fell to one family member to travel to the city, and market the produce, usually the eldest son.

Continued overleaf

THE HISTORY OF POUPART



The Pouparts of Twickenham 1882 - 1895

So it was that we find **William Poupart**, William's son and Samuel's nephew, had first sold the family's produce from their market garden at Bermondsey, later from another family farm at Kew and finally set up in business on his own account at Twickenham. At Marsh Farm he grew apples, pears, plums and cherries, underplanted with cauliflowers and lettuce on sloping beds. William Poupart became an expert on fruit and was a judge for the Royal Horticultural Society. He was also a Justice of the Peace and a benefactor.

It was William of Marsh Farm's first son (the third **William** in the line) who now travelled to London to sell the produce, but when he developed eye sight problems, it was decided that **John** should take over. In November 1892 at the tender age of 16 he took on the mantle of market salesman in Covent Garden.



WILLIAM OF MARSH FARM

The Fledgling Company 1895

John proved keen and adept at selling and soon his enthusiasm and reputation for honesty brought him increasing numbers of customers to his pitch "on the cobbles". His integrity and well-graded produce (something of a rarity at the time) became well-known and so when some of the smaller growers in the Hampton area approached him in 1895 to sell their produce for them, he jumped at the chance. He decided to form a separate business under the name T. J. Poupart, the 'T' standing for Twickenham to differentiate himself from another John Poupart, said to be his uncle, who was then market-gardening in Essex.



JOHN POUPART THE FOUNDER

On 20 May he paid 21 shillings for a telegraphic address and three days later opened an account with the London County Banking Company in Henrietta Street. The story goes that a friend decided he must also have a warehouse and ignoring John's hesitations took on premises on his behalf. On 3 June, at any

rate, a shop at 51 Drury Lane was rented at 18 shillings a week.

On 18 June came the great day and the first entry in the diary logbook, records the first sale of 6 pecks of tomatoes and 22 rims of strawberries for the princely sum of £4 9s 6d, returning £3 14s 8d to the supplier Messrs J Penfold & Son.

Taking on the first Employee

The business grew and prospered. John also began to sell produce from the fast developing Lea Valley. John liked to take a close personal interest in every aspect of the produce being supplied, to talk man-to-man with senders on packaging and quality and so in 1897 took on a young man who had impressed him, a buyer called **William Ravenhill**. It is said that John could not really afford to take this step and so had to give up smoking to help pay the wages of his new recruit.



WILLIAM RAVENHILL

However, it was the right move and the two men forged ahead, John concentrating on the home grown produce and William Ravenhill on the development of imported fruit. William was the first to import oranges from South Africa, and as the business expanded, rare tropical fruits began to appear in the showrooms. He was taken into partnership in 1906.

Expansion 1901 - 1939

John Poupart and William Ravenhill took on further warehouse premises and in 1901 a shop in the coveted Central Avenue had been procured. Later this was expanded to five shops and in 1907 they reached Long Acre. By 1936 T J Poupart had come into possession of all the buildings from 107 to 115 Long Acre and set about commissioning architects to rebuild the frontages with a steel framed structure in Portland stone still there to this day.

The business had expanded enormously during these years: before the First World War, in 1913, a Spitalfields branch was taken over. (It was ultimately closed during the 80s but Poupart has recently just acquired a branch in the new Spitalfields market.) In 1921 T J Poupart (Northern) was opened in Liverpool. By 1923, the partners' sons had joined the business, John's eldest, Harold Poupart and William Ravenhill's only son Donald, who was later to run the business. After a year or so, however, Harold declared a preference for the growing side and returned to John's farm now at Walton-on-Thames and his brother Alec stepped in. In 1930 when William Ravenhill died, Donald, as a young man, was ready to take on his father's importing role.

More branches were added, notably Southampton in 1928 and Bristol in 1930 and by the time of the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 the firm could claim branches in most of the largest ports in Great Britain, as well as depots in Worthing, the Lea Valley and Guernsey and even a South African branch in Cape Town. Over the years the company could boast many firsts: salesmen such as George Burns brought in the first kiwifruit (or Chinese gooseberries, as they were then called); the exclusive agency for Uglifruit (a cross between a grapefruit and a tangerine) was secured in 1926; Donald Ravenhill who was a friend of Jomo Kenyatta's imported the first Kenyan 'bobby' beans.

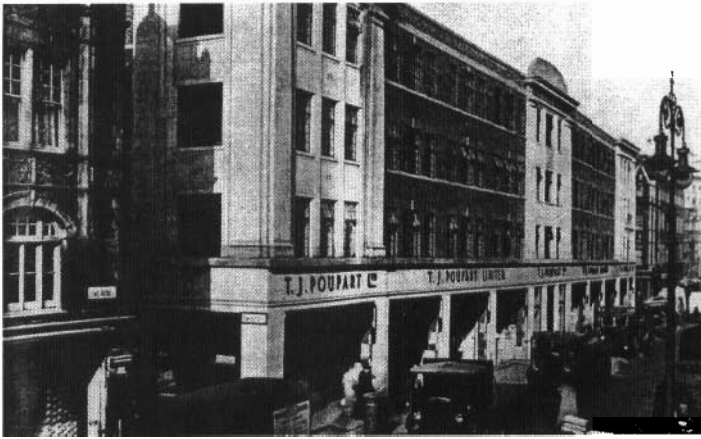


THE HISTORY OF POUPART

The War 1939 - 1945

The Second World War changed everything. The business built so much on worldwide trade had to fall back entirely on the home-grown side. When the Ministry of Food wanted to set up the wartime tomato scheme, John was one of the leading organisers. Donald Ravenhill and Alec Poupart both joined up, leaving John again to shoulder responsibility on his own. He narrowly escaped death several times during enemy bombing and in 1945 before the war ended and just four months before the company would celebrate its Golden Jubilee, John Poupart died.

His contribution to the development of a modern fruit trade was certainly acknowledged at the time and should be remembered today. It was T J Poupart which was instrumental in first bringing to the UK many of the products we take for granted today.



THE 'NEW' BUILDING IN LONG ACRE COMPLETED 1938 SHORTLY BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

SOUTHAMPTON and BRISTOL BEGINNINGS

POUPART Southampton's business actually began from a telephone kiosk close to the Southampton Dry Dock during the 1920s, from which Donald Ravenhill used to sell South African fruit discharged from the Union Castle ships. This was in the days before the Deciduous Fruit Board and the *Cape* and *Outspan* brands existed.

It was not long before he persuaded his father, **William Ravenhill** to form a separate Southampton branch and on 24 November 1928, T J Poupart (Southampton) Limited was incorporated. A small store in the High Street was acquired but soon proved too small and in 1937 the company bought the building of the Hartley Institution, the forerunner of Southampton University. Pouparts had the building reconstructed into a warehouse.

The purchase of the adjacent Raleigh building took place in the '50s, allowing an extension of the warehouse and the large flower and sundries department.

Bristol branch was first opened as a branch of T J Poupart (Southampton) on the waterfront at Welshback. It became a limited company in its own right in 1948. The company prospered and soon emerged as a leader in Bristol's fruit trade.



THE SOUTHAMPTON FRONTAGE AROUND 1938.

In 1968 when the market moved to its present site at Albert Crescent, St Phillips, Poupart was involved in all aspects of the planning and implementation of the move.

Poupart was for many years always well known for the exotic lines and filling seasonal gaps and Bristol always emphasised this side of the business.

DONALD RAVENHILL - SENIOR CITIZENS REMEMBER 1945 - 1976

AFTER the War was over Donald Ravenhill set about rebuilding the import side of the business. Several young men joined the business, who remember him with respect and affection and give us a flavour of what market life was like in the company in those post-war years.



DONALD RAVENHILL

Jim Stead

Jim Stead, now 90 years old, joined the company in 1946 as a Director. Donald Ravenhill felt his extensive network of grower contacts all over southern England would be of benefit to Poupart in extending their supplier base. He had an agricultural background, with a degree from Wye College, and had

previously owned a company selling agrochemicals to growers. For TJP he travelled around 50,000 miles per year.

He has fond memories of old Covent Garden and the repartee of the salesmen. "Donald Ravenhill always picked the right chap for the job," recalls Jim, "some of whom really did have the gift of the gab." One apple salesman persuaded a customer that some boxes of rather small Derbys (cookers) were an entirely new type of apple called an 'Eatco' which were ideal for either eating or cooking.

Ken Farrell

Ken Farrell joined TJP in June 1948 to do nightwork. Donald Ravenhill soon recognised his potential and he was transferred to citrus sales. Ken concentrated on citrus all his working career and by the time he retired in 1992, he had become the trade's citrus guru.

Continued overleaf

DONALD RAVENHILL REMEMBERED - continued from 3

One of Ken Farrell's main achievements was starting the pre-packing business at their Waltham Cross depot. He had trouble persuading Donald Ravenhill to let him have a go, for Harold Poupart had tried, without success, to sell pre-packed salads some 10 years earlier from the Walton-on-Thames farm. But now the time was right. The supermarkets were just beginning their meteoric rise. It was his foresight, therefore, which laid the foundations for today's business.

Roy Lee

"I joined Poupart in 1948 and worked in various administrative posts," remembers Roy Lee. "Donald Ravenhill was an old-fashioned boss. He always called employees by their surnames

and we called him 'Sir' or 'DR'. He also used to ask salesmen, 'How did you get on today selling my produce?'

Roy recalls that he hated salesmen smoking "on duty" and used to try to catch them out. On one occasion he kept a salesman chatting for much longer than usual and then, as he turned to move on, said, "By the way, Stewart, your pocket's on fire."

He was also a stickler for punctuality but could take a joke. Les Fothergill, who retired in 1992 from Covent Garden is reputed not to have been the world's best timekeeper as a young man. One morning Les arrived to be confronted by the boss, saying, "Fothergill, you should have been here at 5 o'clock," Les replied, "Why, sir, what happened?"

Poupart's Managing Directors

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1895 - 1945 | John Poupart |
| 1945 - 1976 | Donald Ravenhill |
| 1976 - 1986 | Les Baker |
| 1986 - 1987 | Neville Wilde |
| 1987 | Tony Beeson |
| 1987 - Present | Laurence Olins |

Poupart 1995

Head Office:

Turnford Place, Cheshunt, Herts.

Primary Wholesale Branches:

Bristol, Cardiff, Hull, New Covent Garden, Southampton, Spitalfields.

Distributive Wholesale Branches:

Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge, Evesham, Lowestoft, Norwich.

Export Office:

Valencia, Spain

Joint Venture Marketing Companies:

OrchardWorld, Colchester, Essex,
BerryWorld, Cheshunt, Herts.

MORE RECENT HISTORY 1986 - Present Day

IN 1986 T J Poupart was bought by Hillsgate Holdings plc and the then managing director, Les Baker, retired. Within eighteen months Hillsgate had recruited the Olins family and the company was refocused with a new image, becoming Poupart Limited, with Laurence Olins as managing director.

The group was then restructured around the four primary wholesale branches, Covent Garden, Bristol, Southampton and Cardiff, and the supermarket supply depot at Waltham Cross, with a total group turnover at that time of £35 million.

Today the Poupart Group operates from 11 wholesale sites, a small distribution centre in Kent, an import trading and head office in Hertfordshire and an export office in Spain. Poupart is a significant shareholder in two joint venture marketing companies, Orchard-

World and BerryWorld. It is part of the Hillsgate Produce organisation, which encompasses all Hillsgate's fresh produce trading companies, including MBM and Beesons, both potato companies.

Poupart is now concentrating on three main areas of business: wholesaling, importing and joint ventures. Distributive wholesaling is currently perceived as having the greatest growth potential. The group now has five sites supplying the food service industry. Organic growth is also expected from the joint venture companies, which supply supermarkets with top fruit and soft fruit.

The Poupart Group is proud of its long heritage and is ready to meet all the challenges and changes the fresh produce industry may bring in the future.



Head Office today at Cheshunt, Herts



Laurence Olins

MARKING THE CENTENARY

TO MARK the centenary of the company, the Poupart Group has adopted a special 100 year logo to be used throughout the whole year. It has been designed by Colin Thompson Design Associates, who have also produced eye-catching trade advertisements.

As well as using the special logo on all stationery and publications during the year, mobiles are being displayed at branches and

centennial mugs have been produced.

A special competition is also being run for customers, featuring Carmel grapes. The first prize is a 100 hour trip for two people to Israel, sponsored by El Al airlines and Carmel, including accommodation in a luxury hotel in Tel Aviv, spending money and a visit to a Kibbutz in the growing area. The competition is based on multiple-choice questions

about Carmel grapes and Poupart's. One hundred runners up will receive Poupart centennial mugs.

